

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY

## Selection of Focus Area

In 1998 the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services convened a symposium on maternal and child health to increase awareness of the disparity in infant mortality between African-American and other County residents. The community identified reducing African-American infant mortality as a priority and established the African-American Health Initiative to work toward eliminating the disparity in infant mortality as well as other health status disparities.



Other Montgomery County focus areas include increasing access to care for low-income, uninsured residents; reducing substance abuse, especially among adolescents; helping young people make smart lifestyle choices; reducing family violence by providing support to high-risk families; reducing asthma hospitalizations among children, especially minorities; reducing HIV infection rates, especially among African-Americans; reducing incidence and complications of diabetes, especially among African-Americans; reducing risk behaviors for oral cancers, especially among African-Americans; and increasing access to oral health care.

### DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

#### Estimated Population, by Race – 1998

Total .....	840,880
White .....	73.4%
Other .....	26.6%

#### Estimated Population, by Age – 1998

Under 1 .....	11,940	18-44 .....	360,230
1-4 .....	44,660	45-64 .....	182,830
5-17 .....	142,850	65+ .....	98,370

All causes Mortality Rate (age-adjusted, per 100,000 population) 1996-1998 ..... 340.7

Infant Mortality Rate 1995-1999 ..... 6.8

Estimated Mean Household Income – 1999 ..... \$91,300

Estimated Median Household Income – 1999 ..... \$68,100

Civilian Unemployment Rate, Annual Average – 1999 ..... 1.8

#### Labor force (Top 4) – 1995

Services .....	216,200	Retail Trade .....	77,600
Government (Federal, Military) .....	88,800	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate .....	51,900

**Sources:** Maryland Vital Statistics, 1999  
Maryland Department of Planning, 1995, 1998, 1999

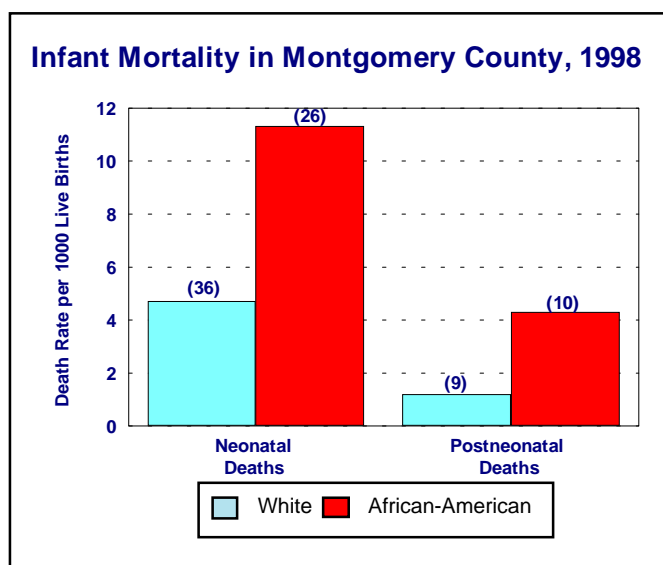
## Reducing African-American Infant Mortality

### Definition

Infant mortality is defined as deaths occurring any time between the date of birth and the first birthday. Causes of death in the first 28 days of life ("neonatal" deaths) are most often due to or associated with premature birth and/or very low birth weight. Severe congenital abnormalities also cause a significant portion of deaths in young infants. Deaths occurring between 29 days and one year of age ("postneonatal" deaths) are due to a wider variety of causes, including Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and infection, in addition to the causes of neonatal mortality.

### Problem

From 1990 to 1998, the most recent figures available, the infant mortality rate among African-Americans in Montgomery County was about four times greater than among white infants. The County's African-American infant mortality rate has frequently exceeded the statewide rate. In 1998, there were 45 white infant deaths and 36 African-American infant deaths. Due to the difference in the size of the African-American population in the County (128,690) compared to the white population (617,460), the death rate per 1,000 live births for African-Americans was greater, 15.6 per 1,000 compared to 5.9 for whites. These rates exceed the federal Healthy People 2010 target of 4.5 per 1,000 live births.



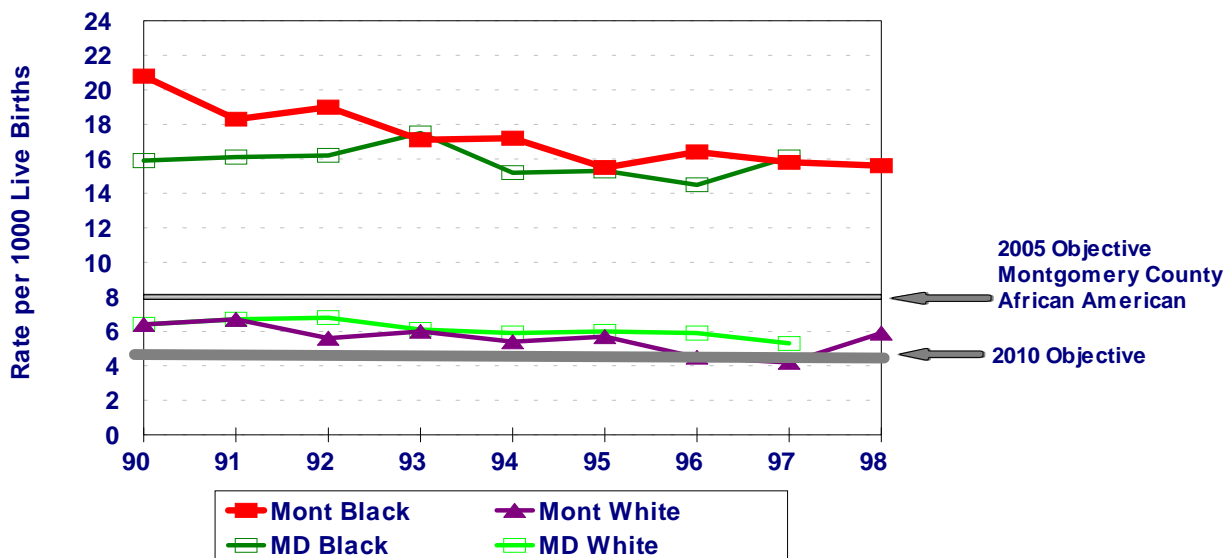
Note: Actual numbers of deaths are in parentheses.

Source: Maryland Vital Statistics, 1998

### Determinants

Lack of prenatal care is strongly associated with an increased risk for low birth weight infants, preterm delivery, and maternal and infant mortality. Federal and State initiatives aim to increase access to prenatal care by expanding Medicaid eligibility. Montgomery County, through a partnership with Holy Cross Hospital, provides prenatal care for low-income, uninsured women not eligible for Medical Assistance. A smaller percentage of African-American women in Montgomery County, regardless of age, entered prenatal care in the first trimester in 1997 (the most recent year figures are available) compared to white women.

### Infant Mortality by Race Montgomery County and Maryland



Source: Maryland Vital Statistics Annual Report

Low birth weight is associated with a poor pregnancy outcome for both baby and mother. The majority of problems affecting newborns are related to prematurity; the earlier in gestation an infant is born, the greater risk. Low birth weight has a variety of causes, many of which are preventable, such as infection, inadequate prenatal care and poor nutrition. Maternal smoking is associated with a slight decrease in birth weight. A mother's low socio-economic status is also linked to her probability of having a low birth weight baby. However, any woman who fails to get good prenatal care, regardless of her socio-economic status, is at greater risk for having a low birth weight baby.

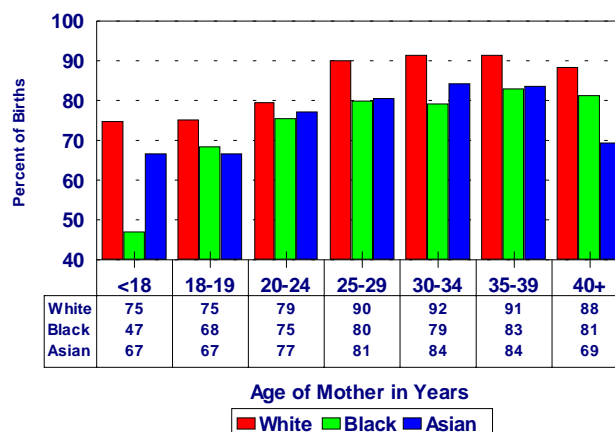
Except for teens, a larger percentage of African-American women in all age groups had low birth weight babies compared to white women in Montgomery County in 1997. One of the overarching goals of the proposed Healthy People 2010 is to eliminate all health disparities. Our goal for African-American infant mortality rate reflects this by challenging ourselves to reduce both the African-American and white infant mortality rates to the 2010 goal of 4.5 per 1,000 live births. To achieve the federal Healthy People 2010 target of 4.5 per 1,000 for African-Americans requires improving pre-pregnancy health, assuring excellent prenatal care and a safe delivery, and providing a sound social and medical environment for infants. These measures should also result in improved infant health and should lay the groundwork for successful education and a healthy, productive life.

To increase community awareness about the severity of this problem, Montgomery County convened a symposium on maternal and child health in 1998. In response, community groups organized the African-American Health Initiative to focus on improving infant mortality and other health problems where there was a significant disparity between African-American and other

county residents. The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) established a Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Board to review medical charts of women who suffered the loss of an infant to determine root causes. Public health officials began disseminating information on ways to reduce infant mortality, such as preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome and reducing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) deaths by placing infants on their backs to sleep. To ensure that all pregnant women can access prenatal care, DHHS, in a partnership with Holy Cross Hospital, provides prenatal care for low-income women ineligible for Medical Assistance.

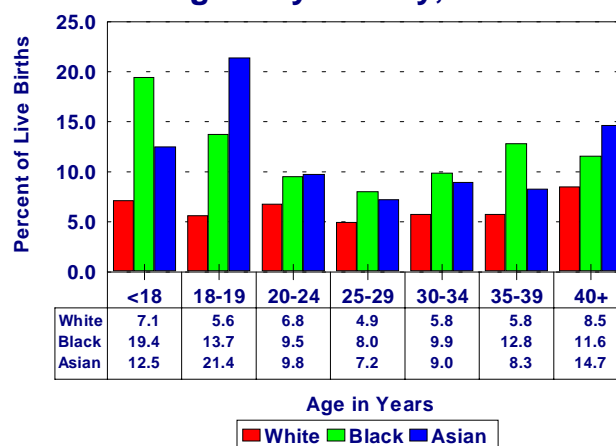
For optimal outcomes, young women need to be healthy prior to becoming pregnant. Community efforts and Montgomery County DHHS programs are directed toward improving nutrition, reducing substance abuse, delaying the age at first pregnancy, and providing an environment which enhances self-esteem and positive expectations for the future. The African-American Health Initiative is preparing a multimedia educational campaign targeted to increase African-American women's awareness of health issues important before conception to ensure a healthy baby.

### First Trimester Entry into Prenatal Care, Montgomery County, 1997



Source: MD Vital Statistics Annual Report

### Low Birth Weight, Montgomery County, 1998



Source: MD Vital Statistics Annual Report

While medical assessment is a well established component of prenatal care, psychosocial risk, such as domestic violence, substance abuse and social isolation, may be overlooked, or providers may be unaware of resources for women needing psychosocial interventions. The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services has partnered with County hospitals to provide each postpartum woman the opportunity before hospital discharge to meet with a community health nurse, who will assess and refer any infants who may benefit from the County's Infant at Risk or Healthy Start programs; offer referrals for home visiting and other support services for medical, psychosocial or parenting concerns; and provide educational materials.

**Objective 1-** Reduce African-American infant mortality from 15.6 in 1998 to 8.0 per 1,000 in 2005 and 4.5 per 1,000 in 2010.

### **Action Steps**

- ⇒ Identify causes of infant mortality: With assistance from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and from the State medical society, Montgomery County initiated a Child Fatality Review Board in 1997 and a Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Board in 1998. These multi-agency boards examine deaths to identify preventable factors to serve as a basis for policy changes in child safety and in the delivery of maternal and infant medical care.
- ⇒ Engage the community in reducing African-American Infant Mortality: The Montgomery County African-American Infant Mortality Coalition, a community group, meets regularly to address and direct actions to promote healthy childbearing and good infant care in African-American families. The coalition is planning a multi-media education campaign, and is working to increase physician awareness of available resources for high-risk pregnant women and to encourage routine screening for bacterial vaginosis.
- ⇒ Improve preconception health: For optimal outcomes, young women need to be healthy prior to becoming pregnant. The African-American Infant Mortality Coalition is preparing a multimedia educational campaign to improve nutrition, reduce substance abuse, delay the age at first pregnancy, and provide an environment which enhances self-esteem and engenders positive expectations for the future.
- ⇒ Assess risk during and after pregnancy: While medical risk assessment is a well established component of prenatal care, psychosocial risks, such as domestic violence, substance abuse and social isolation, may be overlooked or providers may be unaware of resources for women needing psychosocial interventions. Montgomery Babies is a public/private effort involving the Montgomery County DHHS, hospitals, and private social service agencies, to identify and intervene with at-risk families to ensure that risk factors are assessed and needed services provided. After a successful pilot at one hospital, a program that offers new mothers an assessment by a community health nurse with referrals as needed, will be expanded to include other county hospitals.
- ⇒ Promote infant health and safety: DHHS has developed community information campaigns, including brochures, cable TV shows and public presentations, to increase awareness among parents and infant caretakers about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Shaken Baby Syndrome. Parents identified through Montgomery Babies as needing help with substance abuse or other problems, will be referred to appropriate services to ensure that their babies are healthy and safe.

Partners

Adventist Health Care • Bowie State University • CASO America • Children’s Hospital Medical Center • Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families • Community Ministries of Montgomery County • Columbia Hospital for Women • Crossway Community • George Washington University • Grace Episcopal Church • Holy Cross Hospital • Hope for Kids • League of Women Voters, Montgomery County, Health Committee • March of Dimes National Capital Area • Montgomery County African-American Health Initiative • Montgomery County Commission on Health • Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services • Montgomery County Public Schools • Montgomery General Hospital • Mt. Calvary Baptist Church • NAACP • National Council for Negro Women • National Institute of Child Health and Development • U.S. Office of Health Policy • Shady Grove Adventist Hospital • Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences • University of Maryland • Women Glow International

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Cross-Reference Table for Montgomery County	
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